

With the Author's Compliments

The Aesthetic Unity of the Fine Arts

MORE ESPECIALLY
IN RELATION
TO ARCHITECTURE



PAPER READ BY

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at the Convention of the Ontario Association
of Architects held in Toronto, January, 1895,
and also at the Canadian Institute, Toronto,
February, 1895.

Canadian Architect and Builder Press, Toronto.

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IT is only necessary to preface my remarks by saying that I address you as an artist to artists, in the broadest and most catholic sense of the term: fellow-worshippers at the shrine of the beautiful in nature, who feel their dearest ambition is to capture a ray of her glory, and crystallize it into some form of art, which may reflect its refining influence for the good and happiness of mankind, and be an incentive to virtue and noble deeds!

In speaking of architecture, it is not merely in its constructive sense of building, but the conception and creation of such edifices as claim to possess elements of grace and beauty, dignity and attractiveness, which should elevate the soul of the beholder and be a joy forever.

God created man in his own image—body, soul and spirit—and the first mental activities the primitive creature put forth were to build his rude habitation, carve ornaments on the door sills, color them with rude pigments, and chant his dirge or war song. This imitative activity was the Genesis of the arts of design: painting, architecture and sculpture, together with poetry and music—making the five sister muses of form, proportion, color, melody and rhythm—the media by and through which the good and beautiful commune with the soul of man and satisfy his intellectual cravings. And are not these faculties intimately connected and associated with each other in their highest aesthetic fulfillment by some hidden mystery, not yet revealed—the principle underlying each being one and the same?

An apt figure of the five sister arts, their intimate relationship and interdependence, suggests itself to the mind in the structure and vocal organs of the human body:

1st. The skeleton—that wonderful mechanical arrangement upon which all other parts depend, combining, as it does, economy, lightness, strength and ingenuity, suggesting the building or architecture:—

2ndly. The outer covering, i.e., the muscles, giving the contour of form beauty and motion, expressed in sculpture:—

3rdly. The color and texture of the features and the skin, represented in painting:—

4thly and 5thly. Speech and vocal sound; the organs of poetry and music. Here, then, is the perfect model, set up by the Divine Architect, the synthesis of the fine arts, comprehending or embracing color, texture, form, harmony, melody, rhythm and proportion—a living expression of the beautiful in mind and matter.

In the language of the immortal bard: "What a piece of work is a man!—how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god!—the beauty of the world!—the paragon of animals."

Before leaving the masterpiece of creation, as the type or ideal model of beauty, examine for a moment his component parts: The osseous structure called the skeleton, marvel of economy and strength for the burden imposed upon it; the cranium, with its dome and arching brow, exquisite precision of sutures that join the skull; the vertebrae, ribs, pelvis, condyles of the limb bones, with their perfect ball-socket joints. Here is fitness and utility, though not necessarily beauty; yet models for the builder and mechanic in this age of steel.

It is when we consider the myology or muscles that life and beauty are apparent, and both architect and sculptor have been inspired with the perfection

of form for their models. The design of the Greek and Roman mouldings is evidently inspired from the profile of the face, mouth and chin; the gently expanding and tapering columns from the limbs; the groining of the ear, chiselling of nose and nostrils, have also influenced design in architectural forms. In woman, though less powerful than man in structure, the still more graceful curves of form present a veritable incarnation of unspeakable loveliness. Thus we see form in its highest type, which receives its consummation in its texture or outer covering, the skin, the human epidermis, as seen on the cheek of a beautiful woman, combining and blending, as the painter learns, every delicate and luscious tint with the bloom and down of touch—a setting indeed for that incomparable jewel of all, the eye—the soul's window. In color and texture added to form, we reach the absolute—the highest aesthetic ideal of beauty. This trinity in unity, of color, texture, form (form including proportion), constitutes the essential and inseparable elements which the master builder has incorporated, and shows the relation and dependence of each upon the other, to express a perfect *ensemble*, each of the links being a *sine qua non* to the success of the whole; and without which neither the sculptor, painter, architect nor poet, can create his airy palaces or pourtray his themes of lore.

Bulwer well appreciated this unity in the elements of the beautiful in Claude Melnotte's description of the home to which he would take his bride could love fulfil its prayers.—“A palace lifting to eternal summers; its marble walls from out a glossy bower of coolest foliage; musical with birds, whose songs should syllable thy name, * * while the perfumed lights stole through the mists of alabaster lamps, and every air is heavy with the sighs of orange groves, and music from sweet lutes, and murmurs from low fountains that gush forth i' the midst of roses!”

What is the principle in design that predominates in the human form and runs all through nature? It is a succession of curved lines of varying length, entirely free from harshness, producing to the senses a feeling of blending, melody, buoyancy and harmony.

Beauty's wave in human form,
In rose or lily, bird—
In womanhood transcends all things,
'Twas always so, I've heard!

'Twas so in ancient days when Art
Sat graceful on her throne,
And gave her sons that curious line,
True artists love to own.

—Extract.

The religion of the ancients required a habitation in which to worship their deities and store their *lares* and *penates*, and from the four walls of mud and wood, or brick or stone, grew the temple. Ornament, columns and capitals, were added; then the gable broke the monotony of the horizontal. Color followed. The beauty of texture was absent, till marble or an imitation filled the want. Still life was not there—human life. At length the sculptor's chisel and painter's brush filled the pediment with the deed of heroism, and enriched the walls with polychrome. Finally the temple became a work of symmetry, power and beauty; every member was studied with regard to optical value and refinement—carving, gildings and tinting drank in the glorious hues of the prism, which shone refulgent upon its harmonious proportions.

The life of action and deed of valour were implanted there in the metopes and friezes. The magnificent Quadriga and Acroterion statues adorned the angles. Caryatidae took the place of columns; finally the temple became clothed with the matchless genius of Phidias and Apelles—fit habitation indeed for the crowning glory within, the shrine of the god Zeus or

Athene in Chryselephantine. Gold, ivory and precious stones; what would Homer have said had he seen these wonderful achievements in Art.

It was centuries before, he sang of the god:

"He said and nodded with his shadowy brows;
Waved on the immortal head the ambrosial locks,
And all Olympus trembled at his nod."

Remember, it was not the intrinsic value of the material that made the masterpiece. Its value lay in its incomparable embodiment of benign beauty and sublime expression. The genius of Phidias, appreciating the importance of aesthetic unity, at once saw that even marble failed, beautiful as it was, to fulfil the highest ideal of texture as representing the flesh, and so chose ivory—which of all material bears the closest resemblance to the human epidermis. White marble is beautiful when fresh from the chisel, but without great care soils and loses its appearance, till old age or time has turned it into the color of ivory, like the Venus de Milo in her hallowed shrine in the Louvre, or the memorials of old-gold hue such as are seen in Westminster Abbey, or the Elgin marbles from the Parthenon and now in the British Museum—the latter cut 438 B.C.

The true artist or dilettanti, who has drank the nectar from those gods of form and beauty, Phidias, Myron, Scopas, Polycleitus, Praxiteles, and others of the age of Pericles, can only contemplate their works with wonder and fascination at the supreme mastery gained by these sculptors of the human form over their art, yet mingled with regret that so few examples have escaped the hands of the iconoclast and the ravages of war.

We who have worshipped at the feet of Hermes, Aphrodite, the Discobolus, the Gladiator or the Illisus, or the other masterpieces that adorn the Parthenon, feel that this is not the occasion to enter upon the various merits of the works of those great artists. They have been of incalculable value to art and history. They tell the story of their age. We acknowledge them to be the absolute and immutable standards of physical beauty; the ideals for the artists and dilettanti of the world.

The pediment of sculpture expresses at once grandeur, power and life, and it is to be regretted that architects of the Victorian era have not been more inspired with the use and possibilities of statuary—the most profound and longest enduring form of Art—especially in connection with public buildings and monuments, in which the nation's history should be indelibly written.

And how have we of the 18th and 19th centuries treated the classic orders? These forms of architecture have been largely used for public buildings, both in Great Britain and America, but what relation have they borne to their ancient prototypes? Where are the sculptured pediment, frieze and metopes of beauty and action, once instinct with life and imagery?—the tinted walls and colored story? They have departed; the sheen of the rainbow has gone from the classic mouldings; texture of marble, mosaics, encaustic and polychrome, all omitted; Phidias and Apelles are banished; the temple has fallen. The diadem has been torn from her brow, the jewel from her breast—the robe of beauty replaced by sackcloth and ashes. The skeleton alone, in dingy gray or blackened stone, is all that remains to us moderns to help us to imagine we are beholding a noble Greek or Roman columnar edifice, and to enthuse about. Surely an anachronism in art!

With the extravagance and luxury of Imperial Rome, the purity and beauty of Greek sculpture were lost, and with Rome's final destruction all art was extinguished, except that of the monks.

From the Byzantine and the Basilica evolved the Gothic, an entirely new departure. No doubt the minaret was the progenitor or archetype of the

spire and tower; but the principle underlying this remarkable revolution from an aesthetic point of view was the overthrow of the rectangular in art. The temple, shorn of its sculpture and color, is heavy, uninteresting and depressing, and its minor ornaments, though chaste, are monotonous and severe.

Both in plan and elevation, the disposition of the masses of material in the Gothic, being modelled more after nature's ideal of form, is a blending of harmonious lines pleasing to the eye. There's nothing in nature suggestive of the rectangular. The luxuriant plant-life ornament of the early English; the clustered columns; trefoil tracery; graceful arches and groined chapels; those lofty spires seemed to break through the burden of earthly cares, and carry up with them like incense the prayers of the Christian in worship of the true God to the very feet of heaven. "Lift up your heads, oh ye gates! and the glory shall come in." This was the spiritual significance of the Gothic; and it became clothed with at least earthly glory.

Color and texture were added to form. Marbles of every tint, mural paintings, mosaics, the sculptured niche and statues—everything that wealth and art could bestow to render the habitation of God a dream of heavenly beauty. "Gloria in Excelsis Deo."

In the revival of art and learning in Italy, sculpture and painting again took their place as a power in the world. Aesthetic unity and harmony of design were insured and rendered more potent by the fact that in so many instances, painting, sculpture and architecture were combined in the work of the same artist.

The Florentines were quick to appreciate and express their joy on the dawn of renewed artistic life. When Cimabué first taught the world to paint anew, Florence proclaimed a public holiday in honor of his masterpiece, for S. Maria Novello. Nicola Persano, Giotto, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Della Robbia, Ghiberti and other architects, painters and sculptors—the progenitors of the Renaissance—brought their genius and devotion to bring about the fuller perfection which culminated in Raphael, Correggio, Da Vinci and Michael Angelo—the four pillars or archangels of that great epoch of art—and terminated in Cellini, Tintoretto, Titian and Paul Veronese, masterful exemplars of the mundane magnificence of Venice.

The Italian revival affected the purity of Hellenic form, but it accomplished something greater:—it portrayed not merely the perfection of sensuous beauty in the form, or sublime grandeur of the gods—the teachings of Christ were expressed in human sympathy and love, devotion and adoration, at the gift of God in his son, and the struggles and throes through which man is passing to attain eternal life. What a joyous note of hope, of harmony, of sentiment, of love and adoration was theirs—Persano, Giotto, Donatello, Della Robbia, Ghiberti!

Religious faith was the stimulus which inspired their genius and devotion. How much is art indebted to these sculptors of the early Renaissance!

In the conception of a noble edifice, the architect has crossed the border line of a mere building—i.e., a huge cube with holes to admit light and entrance—and entered the domain of the painter and sculptor. Form, in its first stage, viz., the handling and arranging into harmony of the gross masses or masonry, so as to bring about the greatest effect of beauty and proportion; realizing a noble outline or form in the gross. The carver must now join him in decorative enrichments to make the work interesting and repay closer inspection—form in detail or abstract; still only ornament. The sculptor then takes him to a higher plane, with emblematic or symbolic figures, in *basso* or *alto* *relievo*, or round attached form in transition, in which the walls gently breathe the story or mind of the building, its history or purpose. No form of art is more profound, than these children of the mist emerging from fancy into reality—form in the first stage of statuary.

Every building of importance should be treated in this way, and would therefore be an object lesson and work of interest forever, not only to those who see it many times—perhaps every day of their lives—but also to the stranger; the most emphatic record of civic or national achievements, events or progress.

The Reformation gave the death knell to sculpture and ornamentation for a time in Protestant countries, till a church became bereft of all beauty. The Gothic was treated similarly to the Classic—shorn of its art—the shell only remaining, and all art suffered in consequence.

How sad it is to look upon our cathedrals in brick—not in form, but, alas, —in texture and color. It is only during the last quarter of this century that we are beginning to awake from this iconoclastic superstition and believe that we can worship God "in spirit and in truth," and at the same time beautify his house with tinted walls and stained glass, and other decorations.

Freedom and toleration are the spirit of the age, and the impulse in art is to discover something new and best adapted to our surroundings. In architecture we are in a state of transition, if not of chaos, and in danger of degenerating into confusion and ugliness. It is this critical stage that affords the opportunity for our architects to create a style that, while retaining all that is beautiful in the heritage of the past, will meet the requirements of the climate, and be distinctly national in character, ornament and expression.

Form is the first element of the beautiful in aesthetics, and influences everything we see and hear in nature and art, from the throat of a nightingale or a Patti, the melody of a Stradivarius, to the acoustics of a building, and should be the object of study from the lowest step to the highest pinnacle of a structure. In a wider sense it also affects the laying out of streets, parks, squares and gardens; the selection of a site, the raised plateau or eminence, upon which important edifices may be erected; the fountain, steps and terraced walk, with sculptured vases and ideal statuary, such as we see at the Crystal Palace, Versailles, the Tuilleries Gardens or in Edinburgh. All are form, perceptible to sight and touch, and instinct with life and power to give us joy and elevate our souls, improve our manners and relieve our daily burthens.

The modern Romanesque does not impress you with a sense of grandeur or beauty. Its basket-work ornament, unlike the longer and more graceful Gothic plant life, is indefinite and confusing, and with the horrible heads of animals called "grotesque," is barbarous. It no doubt originated in the early stages of inability to imitate life better. It is unfit for a woman to look upon, and should be banished from the front, or any part of a building where the lesson of beauty should be presented. There is a place for the conventional—but as little of it as possible. The lamp of truth in art has been extinguished so many times by wars and puritanism, that form still goes on crutches in the respect of carving and sculpture.

Foliage, fruit, flowers and other imitations of organic objects, should keep as close to nature as possible, to be of interest, due regard being paid to the nature of the material employed. Organic nature should be more largely drawn from for objects of ornament, and executed in the fulness of its natural beauty. The divine sculptor has furnished us with many noble and beautiful examples for imitation, to wit—the lion, the tiger, the horse, the ox, the ram, the hound, the deer and gazelle; the eagle, the swan, the dove and other birds; the dolphin, the nautilus, and other denizens of the deep. Many of these are symbolic; all are grand or beautiful, and as ornament in appropriate positions, would be of far greater interest than conventional scrolls, and serve to remind us of the wonders of nature.

The higher stages of sculpture proper, viz., figure subjects in relief and th

statue, or group in the round form, may be termed the "lamp of life," and provision should be made for each of these forms in every building which claims to be a work of architecture. The relief has been described as the shibboleth or watchword of art, and has a philosophy peculiarly its own. It is specially adapted for emblematic figures, filling spaces in the architecture, and for special subjects in the history of the institution to which the building is dedicated, on the exterior or in positions where painting is undesirable.

The entrance and inner halls, vestibule and staircase, are suitable for natural or emblematic statuary, brackets for busts, and niches for statues of the genius loci, founder or benefactor, care being taken by the architect that light is provided at a suitable angle for both night and day.

The highest stage of sculpture has no necessary connection with a building, unless from local circumstances. It is reached in either the group or solitary figure, expressing an abstract motif, an emotion or passion, or any of the higher attributes of our being, or the elements of nature which may bear personification, or in national monuments where philanthropy, statesmanship or patriotism are commemorated.

The next important member of the aesthetic trinity is color, and when we consider the share this element occupies in the book of nature—how generously the Almighty has decked his creatures—whether our wondering upturned eyes gaze into the infinite azure of the brave overhanging firmament, fretted with golden fire; the jasper of the vasty deep; the carnation of the rose; the pallor or orange of the lily—each with its spiritual significance and relation to form and sound—we recognize at once the length and depth and breadth of his boundless generosity in this particular gift, and we marvel how it can be possible that in the 19th century, man should, even in his most joyous and festive moments, clothe himself in black from head to foot—a color that is always alluded to in terms of horror and associated with our worst enemy, and one that is the least seen in nature's kaleidoscope.

Color is nature's life and light and joy-giver, and when its presence is withheld from us, our spirits are in like measure depressed. To speak of her riches requires the rhapsody of the poet; to comprehend her glory, the eye and wings of the eagle, to carry us to the floor of heaven. The painter is privileged to penetrate her hidden mysteries and capture the fleeting subtleties of her ever-changing moods.

In architecture, the scheme of color decoration should receive the most careful consideration, and be in relation and conjunction with the carving and ornament in form. In all important buildings spaces should be provided in the halls, staircase and ceilings, arches and domes, for special frescoes by artists of ability, affording opportunity for tableaux of prominent incidents or scenes in the life of the country, in alliance with the objects of the building. By this means the skill of our eminent painters could be utilized for the education, happiness and intellectual enjoyment of the people. Stained glass, mosaic, furnishing and lighting, should all be included in the one scheme of design, and require the same mind and care in their use—the cardinal virtue of all decoration being strictly observed, viz., the securing of cluster and space, and repose, so essential in art.

In order to effect a complete aesthetic harmony, texture—its substance, or rather, material—has to be considered, which, of course, is involved so largely in color that the one can hardly be discussed without the other, bearing, as it does, the same relation to form as form does to sound. The ancients saw the importance of producing color and texture, and where costly marbles could not be procured, the artificial substitute approaching as nearly as possible to the semi-transparent beauty of marble was provided. Stone is the next best material, especially for carving, but cannot be relied upon to stand climatic influences, besides not fulfilling the highest aesthetic requirements. Brick, as it has been used, is an abomination,

but we are glad to see improvements taking place in its manufacture. Greater size and neutrality of color, combined with a soft or egg-shell glaze, may render it much more acceptable. Under this head I may mention a material which, now existing, but not in general use, having all the beauty of texture and colors of marble, is not affected by climate.

In the brief remarks the present opportunity has afforded me, I have endeavored to show the important place *Form* occupies in the elements of the beautiful, especially in its pre-eminent phases of architecture and sculpture, and the influence it must have upon the dignity and attractiveness of a city of learning, art and culture, and as the medium of expression in art of a nation illustrious in noble deeds and beneficence; yet I feel the fringe only of the subject has been approached.

Before concluding this paper, I venture to call attention to two or three matters seriously affecting the beauty of our city, and which constitute an outrage to good taste and common sense:

1st. The dangerous and unsightly trolley, telephone and electric light poles, wires, &c., which should never have been erected in a city like Toronto.

2nd. The want of public squares, tastefully laid out. The objectionable mode of taxing lawns at the side of residences.

3rd. The disposition to build up our principal corners to an angle instead of to an octagon or circus.

4th. We are now erecting municipal buildings of a costly character, and if the system of building without regard to beauty is allowed to continue, the view as you ascend Bay street will be narrowed, and the Court House dwarfed by some enterprising merchants. Such a course would be worse than a blunder, and should not be allowed to take place at any price.

Many other points in connection with the aesthetic welfare of our city demand immediate attention. What is required to prevent future mistakes and perhaps rectify past errors, is the appointment of some central authority, such as a City Architect or Minister of Public Works, to prevent the erection of unsightly buildings, and preserve important open places as gardens. Such a person or board of control should be appointed for their known taste and abilities, and they should be backed up by an association of dilettanti, both professional and lay, who would carefully guard the aesthetic interests of the city, and render it the pride of her inhabitants, the admiration of its visitors and the envy of other cities.

Brethren in Art—As the genii and guardians of the beautiful, in all that concerns the artistic progress of your country, and the cities in which you dwell, you are called upon to devote your talents, your love and your watchfulness to her service; to bind yourselves together in the Brotherhood of Art, for her defence; for the vanquishment of the Philistine and the Utilitarian; for the prevention of errors and incongruities, outrages to taste and beauty, frequently occurring, and which now threaten irreparable injury to the few remaining places of interest in this city; that you apply your genius to the development of a distinctly Canadian Architecture, suitable to the conditions of the country, and upon which shall be implanted in sculpture and painting, the romance and lore of her history, the valour of her sons, the beauty of her daughters and the industry and resources of her people, together with the picturesque grandeur of your scenery and skies—notes of harmony and patriotism, which shall shed lustre upon your country, inspire the poet, the musician and the historian, and earn for yourselves a niche in the eternal temple of fame.